

From Wonderland to Wasteland:
The Wonderful Wizard of Oz,
The Great Gatsby, and the
New American Fairy Tale

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THE FAIRY TALE IN AMERICA

In 1919, *The New York Times* ran an editorial lamenting the end of an era: “L. Frank Baum is dead, [. . .] and the children have suffered a loss they do not know” (“Fairy Tales” 140). While this article is ostensibly an obituary, it mourns the death of the fairy tale genre as much as it does one of its artists. But the announcement of the fairy tale’s demise is a bit late, the article implies, because “a fairy story has to be written by one who believes in fairies,” and Baum did not. Observing that “behind the scenes you could see the smile of the showman” (140, 141), the writer describes Baum as a wizard of sorts, projecting images on a screen to entertain his audience, an audience who feigns belief just as much as the author does. “Is the age of fairy-tale writing [dead]?” the writer asks. “Not so long as men like Baum can counterfeit it. But the real note of sincerity can never come back in this age. We cannot write about fairies with honesty any more than we can write about Greek gods” (142). The editorialist describes another collection of tales as “a perfectly good book of fairy stories for children [. . .], but no sort of fairy story for people who know what the real thing is” (140). While “real” seems to be a questionable adjective for a genre defined by fantasy, by its subversion of reality, it does raise some important issues about the place of the fairy tale

in American culture. The *New York Times* editorial reveals the nation's inherent objection to the fairy tale: It isn't real. Brian Attebery notes that "a general trend, since the landing of the Puritans, has been a paring away of the supernatural in those folk genres most amenable to them" (16), and Selma Lanes contends that the nation had little need for fairy stories when "bountiful fulfillment in the real world lay within the grasp of all" (91)—at least theoretically. The traditional characters of such tales—kings, queens, princes, and princesses—were out of step with democracy, and magic itself was dwarfed by the reality of the American experience, filled as it was with seemingly unrelenting technological invention, geographical expansion, and economic development. "Fairy tales," Lanes writes, "were consolation for lives in need of magical solutions; but here man was master of his fate" (92)—at least for a time. When that time passed, along with a concomitant loss of faith in the American dream itself, a space opened for the American fairy tale. That dream, constructed on realities as visceral as available frontier, westward expansion, financial success, and technological know-how, could only be resurrected in fantasy.

Consequently, the American fairy tale comes into its own in the late nineteenth century—in the writings of Frank Stockton and L. Frank Baum, in the stories published in *St. Nicholas Magazine* that flourished under the editorship of Mary Mapes Dodge (1873-1905). One hundred years after the nation gained its independence, and just a few decades after Horatio Alger published his rags-to-riches fantasies, the fairy tale comes alive to chronicle the rise and fall of the American dream. In this light, the *Times'* editorial, which postulates the reality of unreality by subscribing to a belief in "true" fairy tales, perversely reveals the growing theme of post-World War I art and literature: *the* unreality of reality. In 1925, F. Scott Fitzgerald writes his own obituary of the American dream through the eyes and voice of Nick Carraway, the overtly Platonic narrator of *The Great Gatsby*, who laments "the unreality of reality, a promise that the rock

of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing" (105).¹ L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, then, becomes the canvas on which Fitzgerald paints the failure of the American dream twenty-five years later. While Baum may have feigned belief in wonderland, he illustrated a strong conviction in the American dream in his westward travels from his childhood home in New York to the Chicago of the Exposition and ultimately to the nation's own fairy tale space, California, where he hoped to depict Oz in film, a medium he deemed more suitable than books (Zipes, *When Dreams Came True* 167). While Fitzgerald, whose own travels east from Minnesota to New York to Europe inversely paralleled Baum's, seemed to believe in wonderland (which might explain how he, too, ended up in California), his novel declares that the seductive dream—"the green light, the orgasmic future"—is continuously receding, as he paints the picture of the fall from "the old island [. . .] that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes" into the Valley of Ashes over Baum's depiction of the rise from a bleak Kansas farm to the Emerald City (Fitzgerald, *Gatsby* 189).

OZ: AN AMERICAN FANTASY

The importance of place—including the imagined space of a mythical American past—is as clear in Baum's tale as it is in *The Great Gatsby*. Baum's working titles, including "The City of Oz" and "The Emerald City" (Hearn xl), emphasize the wizard's home more than the man himself, and, as Matthew Bruccoli has noted, one of the earlier titles for *The Great Gatsby* was "On The Road to West Egg." The geographies of both works clearly refer

¹In *The Achieving of The Great Gatsby*, Richard Long describes Fitzgerald's style as a nexus of the fairy tale tradition and naturalism. Peter L. Hays contends that "Fitzgerald has used the qualities of legend and fairy tale in *Gatsby* to mock the American dream" (223). Jeffrey Hart argues in "Anything Can Happen: Magical Transformation in *The Great Gatsby*" (*The South Carolina Review* 25.2 [1993]: 37-50) that the city in *The Great Gatsby* is a place of magic.

to the United States, and both books are routinely printed with maps. As Jerry Griswold argues, the map of Oz, with its regional and philosophical distinctions between East, West, North, and South, is a map of the United States, and the Emerald City is the Chicago of the Columbian Exposition. But, more importantly, Oz is a reflection of actual circumstances at the turn of the century when P. T. Barnum was a national hero and foreigners dreamed of streets paved with gold. What brings both Dorothy Gale and Nick Carraway to their enchanted places is the quest for the American dream.² Once she lands in Oz, Dorothy's only desire is to return to Kansas, and the entire narrative describes her quest for the power to return home. Nick begins his narrative from his Midwestern home. He has already returned, and his story is thus shot through with the knowledge that he only remains in the east for a summer. The puzzle in both works is, of course, why the protagonists choose to return home.

While Dorothy is ostensibly involuntarily displaced by a tornado, she is escaping one of the most dismal sites on earth:

When Dorothy stood in the doorway and looked around, she could see nothing but the great gray prairie on every side. Not a tree nor a house broke the broad sweep of flat country that reached the edge of the sky in all directions. The sun had baked the plowed land into a gray mass, with little cracks running through it. Even the grass was not green, for the sun had burned the tops of the long blades until they were the same gray color to be seen everywhere. Once the house had been painted, but the sun blistered the paint and the rains washed it away, and now the house was as dull and gray as everything else. (18)

In Kansas, nature is the enemy, one, moreover, that wreaks havoc on people as well as land: "When Aunt Em came there to live she was a young pretty wife. The sun and wind had changed her, too. They had taken the sparkle from her eyes and left them a sober gray; they had taken the red from her cheeks and lips, and they

²Attebery contends that Baum exploits "the powerful but receding faith in the American dream" in his tale (88).

were gray also" (18). Neither of Dorothy's caretakers smiles or laughs, and indeed her own laughter thoroughly unnerves her aunt. What saves Dorothy from a similarly joyless fate is Toto, who, as his name suggests, represents completion (Hudlin 447). After her journey to Oz, Dorothy describes Kansas to the Scarecrow, and he can only respond, "I cannot understand why you should wish to leave this beautiful country and go back to the dry, gray place you call Kansas" (75). Dorothy attributes his incomprehension to his alleged stupidity: "No matter how dreary and gray our homes are, we people of flesh and blood would rather live there than in any other country, be it ever so beautiful. There is no place like home" (75-76). Notwithstanding his lack of brains, the Scarecrow is wise enough to note that "[i]f your heads were stuffed with straw, like mine, you would probably all live in the beautiful places, and then Kansas would have no people at all. It is fortunate for Kansas that you have brains" (76). Baum's irony here is straightforward enough even for those who do not know that his brief venture westward—to Aberdeen in 1888 in what would later be called South Dakota—lasted only three years. Stories about the bountiful west were still in full circulation, but a depression and a drought resulted in a wasteland rather than a wonderland. After a number of jobs in Aberdeen—the opening of Baum's Bazaar in 1888, a retail venture lasting only thirteen months, and the purchasing of a newspaper, which he renamed the Aberdeen *Saturday Pioneer*—he left South Dakota in 1891, eventually bringing his family to Chicago, which, in its preparation for the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, was considerably more akin to Oz than to Kansas, a fact confirmed by Baum, who described it as a city "entirely of the present" (qtd. in Leach, "Clown" 17).

Baum's brief residence in South Dakota coincided with the 1890 census's conclusion that the frontier was closed, and his experiences no doubt confirmed that the rumors of infinite riches in the west were unfounded. In consequence, Baum invented an extension of the America frontier in Oz (McHale 50).

With the exception of the fact that the west is still wild, Baum's new American frontier is very much like the old one. Attebery identifies Oz as "the agrarian promised land" (86), a more spectacular version of the United States. The eastern Munchkins, whom Dorothy first meets when her house lands, are farmers, as are the Winkies in the west. The land in Oz, however, is in stark contrast to the grayness of Kansas:

The cyclone had set the house down, very gently—for a cyclone—in the midst of a country of marvelous beauty. There were lovely patches of greensward all about, with stately trees bearing rich and luscious fruits. Banks of gorgeous flowers were on every hand, and birds with rare and brilliant plumage sang and fluttered in the trees and bushes. A little way off was a small brook, rushing and sparkling along between green banks, and murmuring in a voice very grateful to a little girl who had lived so long on the dry, gray prairies. (34)

Nature, as depicted in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, is beautiful only insofar as it is controlled.³ The Munchkin territory is picturesque, its "neat fences at the sides of the road, painted a dainty blue color, and [. . .] fields of grain and vegetables in abundance" are illustrative of a Jeffersonian aesthetic. But there are numerous references to the dangers of the natural world, including the fairyland's desert that "none could live to cross" (49). Poppies, fighting trees, wild animals, and inclement weather conspire to make Dorothy's journey perilous, but her success suggests that the tale is as much about the essentially American traits of ingenuity, industry, and tenacity necessary to overcome the natural world. The Scarecrow is always figuring out how to circumvent natural hazards. He is the first to oil the Tin Woodman after a crying jag as well as the one who imagines mechanical responses to physical obstacles—the construction of a bridge to span a gulf too wide for the Lion to jump across as well as its destruction to prevent the Kalidahs from following them, and the building of a truck to allow field mice to pull the

³Edward Wagenknecht has noted a "fuller command over nature in Oz than we enjoy in any country yet known" (153).

drugged Cowardly Lion out of the poppy field. By Chapter 19, the Woodman has figured out how useful his axe is and employs it to chop the fighting trees that are preventing the characters from reaching Glinda.

Indeed, the Woodman and the Scarecrow have a distinct advantage over the living creatures in the story. The Scarecrow routinely offers to be the guinea pig in various circumstances—whether it is crossing a ditch atop the Lion’s back or walking into a forest of fighting trees—because he is virtually immune to permanent damage. Dorothy’s human nature renders her physically as well as emotionally vulnerable. The tale is replete with references to Dorothy’s hunger, thirst, and fatigue, and until the Lion joins her, the only other character who needs sustenance is Toto. Indeed, one of the advantages of the artificial world in Baum’s story is its ability to survive in the absence of food, water, and sleep. The Scarecrow, an inanimate object literally painted into consciousness, and the Tin Woodman, a man who is repaired by a smithy after a curse causes him to dismember himself, exemplify technology in the tale. As the Scarecrow astutely notes, “It must be inconvenient to be made of flesh [. . .] for you must sleep, and eat and drink” (87, 89).

Baum was enchanted by technology, considering it akin to magic, and in 1901 he illustrated that connection in *The Master Key*, a fairy tale about electricity. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* has been celebrated as a fairy tale made distinctly American through the incorporation of technology.⁴ In a world where the streets are paved with green marble and studded with emeralds, and in which “[e]veryone seemed happy and contented and prosperous” (4, 177), the citizens’ control of their environment no

⁴Russell Nye notes that Baum “grafted twentieth-century technology to the fairy-tale tradition” (168). Edward Wagenknecht argues that in the use of machinery and the representation of American places Baum’s book illustrates “the first distinctive attempt to construct a fairyland out of American materials” (147). Baum is also credited with inventing what some critics consider the first robot in American literature: the Tik-Tok man.

doubt stimulates their felicity and affluence. As Richard Lehan argues in *The City in Literature*, urban areas promise mastery of nature (13), and that mastery reaches its apex in the Emerald City. Any creature entering the city must wear green-colored glasses to maintain the myth of the metropolis—and that is only the beginning of the city's deception.⁵ The Wizard, we soon realize, is really just a balding ventriloquist from Omaha who blew into Oz in his hot-air balloon. Having avoided being seen by most of the Emerald City's residents, he maintains complete anonymity by projecting various images on a screen. As it turns out, the "green world" of Oz is not quite as green as it appears, and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* celebrates technology as least as much as pastoralism. Marius Bewley and Jack Zipes both observe a satisfactory resolution between nature and technology in Oz; given the drought and depression plaguing both the nation's real-life South Dakota and the author's fictional Kansas, however, it seems more likely that the pastoral tone of the fairy tale is elegiac, a fond farewell for a time when agrarianism was a cornerstone of American industry but also a pleased recognition that technology has come to stay and to rule. This point is made perfectly in *The Emerald City of Oz* (1910), in which Dorothy, despite her initial desperation to return to the plains, relocates to Oz, along with her aunt and uncle, leaving her Kansas home permanently and seemingly without regret.⁶

FITZGERALD'S ANTI-FAIRY TALE

It is worth noting that Baum wrote other works aside from his Oz books: In 1903, his electric fairy tale, *The Master Key*, was

⁵The green spectacles are not the only references to distorted vision in the fairy tale. The Scarecrow's eyes are painted, and his vision is only as reliable as the paint. The Tin Woodman's eyes are subject to rust when he cries, which is fairly often, and Dorothy cannot see in the dark.

⁶While Baum and Fitzgerald send their protagonists back to home and hearth in the Midwest, the authors themselves headed to Hollywood a few years after their books were published.

listed as one of most admired books by readers of *St. Nicholas*, the most popular children's magazine of its day (Hearn lii), and in 1904 and 1905 one of his fairy tales, *Queen Zixi of Ix*, was serialized in *St. Nicholas*. *St. Nicholas*, the magazine that popularized fairy tale writing, was also Fitzgerald's favorite juvenile reading, so it is not surprising that the typical fairy tale conventions are all present in *The Great Gatsby* (Attebery 93-94)⁷—the journey motif, the tension between good and evil, the magical interventions and transformations, the descriptions of jewels and flowers.⁸ His insatiable hunger—for Daisy, for success, for identity—is the lack suffered by the fairy tale protagonist. In the five years between the war and his move to West Egg, Gatsby is tested and, to a certain extent, succeeds. He obtains the magical agent that enables him to complete his lack, but its effect is temporal since the “alchemical reagent that transmutes the ordinary worthlessness of life” is money (Ornstein 62). The typical resolution in fairy tales is inverted in *The Great Gatsby* as the hero, rather than marrying and ascending to the throne, loses his princess and sinks into a hole in the ground.

While Gatsby's rejection of his parentage connects him with a host of orphaned American heroes, including Dorothy Gale, he is neither the only character from Fitzgerald's novel with a kinship to Dorothy nor the only fairy tale hero. Nick Carraway, like Baum's protagonist, is a Midwesterner who travels to a strange land filled with beauty and horror. Dorothy is literally lifted out

⁷Ronald Berman argues that “[t]he narratives of childhood infiltrate this [*The Great Gatsby*]” (188). Robert E. Morseberger makes the case that “some of the most potent and enduring influences may not be great art but childhood and adolescent enthusiasms” (121). Apparently, Fitzgerald loved Baum's tale and even suggested that MGM make a Marx Brothers version of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Fitzgerald not only subscribed to *St. Nicholas*, much preferring it to the other popular juvenile magazine, *Youth's Companion*, as Andrew Turnbull notes (14), but he won honorable mention for photography in a 1910 contest sponsored by the magazine (Rosta 43).

⁸William Leach identifies these elements in the fairy tale tradition (*Land of Desire* 249).

of her barren Kansas farm and transported to Oz by a tornado. Nick is carried away (as suggested by his surname) from Chicago to New York by his post-war desire for wealth and adventure. He is no less enchanted by money than the eponymous subject of his rapt attention. Indeed, his “restlessness” after an immensely satisfying jaunt in World War I leads him east, where he buys “a dozen volumes on banking and credit and investment securities” that “[stand] on [his] shelf in red and gold like new money, promising to unfold the shining secrets that only Midas and Morgan and MÆcenas knew” (8) and settles in a cheap house whose only benefit is its “consoling proximity of millionaires” (10) while he plans to make his fortune in bonds. While Nick is an unlikely hero, lacking the “romantic readiness” and “colossal vitality” of imagination that he so admires in Gatsby, he may be the appropriate hero of an anti-fairy tale. Steven Swann Jones indicates that the classic fairy tale structure follows “a pattern of separation (call to adventure, threshold crossing), initiation (confrontation with antagonist, divinity), and return (return crossing and reincorporation into the community)” in which the protagonist acquires a greater awareness of his own desires and fears (15). While Gatsby separates from his home and fulfills the role of wanderer that many deem pivotal to the role of fairy tale hero, he never returns, and it is unlikely that his initiation leads to self-awareness. Nick’s summer in New York serves as an initiation into a world of excess, corruption, and inauthenticity, which Nick at least seems to believe has made him wiser. Indeed, Nick’s smugness in his assurance of his own correct vision gives rise to the violation of an interdiction (and is, incidentally, typical of the fairy tale genre [Jones 11]). “In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I’ve been turning over in my mind ever since. ‘Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone,’ he told me, ‘just remember that all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had’” (5). Nick understands his father to mean “moral” advantages, and his purported response is an “inclin[ation] to reserve all

judgements" (5), an inclination honored more in the breach than in the observance. Aside from his misreading of his father's statement, which seems as likely to mean financial and social advantages as moral, Nick violates his own understanding of the remark by constantly judging the characters in his drama.

Our guide through the enchanted lands of East Egg and Manhattan, as well as the underworld of the Valley of Ashes, brings the full weight of heightened narrative language to bear on his subject. The first chapter sets the novel's tone with its extravagant descriptors: "gorgeous," "gay," "exciting," "romantic," "extraordinary," "shining," and "glistening." The Buchanans's home is suffused with light, a "rose-colored" or "rosy-colored" glow that complements the glittering gold and silver. Unspoken are the "secrets" and "dreams" so essential to a fairy tale. The Buchanan home, whose lawn "ran toward the front door for a quarter of a mile, jumping over sun-dials and brick walls and burning gardens" (11-12), and its inhabitants take on magical qualities: Daisy and Jordan, whose "dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house," seem to levitate "as though upon an anchored balloon" (12). Emerging from the railway station, Nick comments on the "glowing sunshine" (31) of Manhattan whose architecture—including an apartment building resembling "one slice in a long white cake of apartment houses" (32)—is something out of a child's daydreams. Later, he refers to his "haunting loneliness" during his fantasy-laden meanderings in the "enchanted metropolitan twilight" (61-62).

Placing the reader in a fairy land where "white palaces" (10) vie for attention with a confectionary metropolis "of white heaps and sugar lumps all built with a wish" (73), a region where "[a]nything can happen" (73), Nick announces that "life was beginning over again" (8) in much the same way a more traditional fairy tale narrator might open with "Once upon a time." The novel reads like a fable inhabited by the "fantastic mixtures of human, animal, vegetable and mineral" that Lüthi

identifies as a defining influence of the fairy tale tradition (146): Doctor Civet, Edgar Beaver, Cecil Roebuck, James B. Ferret, Klipspringer, George Duckweed, Francis Bull, Henry L. Palmetto, S. B. Whitebait, Beluga the tobacco importer, Clarence Endive, the Leeches, the Fishguards, the Ripley Snells, the Blackbucks, the Hornbeams, the Catlips, Owl-Eyes, and the Hammerheads, recalling the armless, flat-headed creatures of the same name Dorothy and her friends encounter en route to Glinda, all attend Gatsby's soirees. Like the animals that assist fairy tale protagonists, Meyer Wolfsheim (and, perhaps, by association, Katspaugh) credits himself with starting Gatsby's career, but given the nature of this anti-fairy tale, it is no surprise that Wolfsheim refuses to attend Gatsby's funeral. Moreover, Nick's dog, with whom he begins the adventure on West Egg, runs away, and, unlike Toto, never returns.

Just as marvelous as the novel's characters are Gatsby's parties, in which "floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside until the air is alive with chatter and laughter and casual innuendo" and the "colored lights [. . . which] make a Christmas tree of Gatsby's enormous garden [. . .] grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun" (44), are hardly real at all. Nick's animation of inanimate objects, such as his description of Gatsby's station wagon as "scamper[ing] like a brisk yellow bug" (43), is partly responsible for the magical quality of the party, as is the synesthesia that heightens the sense of unreality as "the orchestra [. . .] play[s] yellow cocktail music" (44). But the fairy tale effect in this passage relies most heavily on Nick's shift in verb tense. He begins Chapter 3 in a past tense that describes no particular occasion ("There was music from my neighbor's house through the summer nights"[43]) but shifts in the fourth paragraph to the present tense to depict a specific moment ("By seven o'clock the orchestra has arrived [. . .]. The last swimmers have come in from the beach now and are dressing upstairs [. . .]"[44]). After a few brief paragraphs, Nick returns to his customary past tense, and his continued description of his first

experience at one of Gatsby's parties becomes somewhat less enchanted. His subtle shift in time and space recalls Attebery's description of fairy tales as "always and never, long past yet still taking place" (12), a statement that also applies to Nick's description of prelapsarian America—"the fresh green breast of the new world" (189).

Lüthi contends that the

fairy tale conquers time by ignoring it [. . .]. The fairy tale and similar genres [. . .] remove us from the time continuum and make us feel that there is another way of viewing and experiencing life, that behind all birth and death, there is another world, resplendent, imperishable, and incorruptible. (45)

It is virtually impossible to read *The Great Gatsby* without pondering its eponymous characters' dubious relationship to time. Gatsby, who reinvents himself by rejecting his past, who tells Daisy to erase the previous five years, and who symbolically knocks the clock off of Nick's mantel, is at odds with time. But Lüthi's language describes Nick, whose longing for purity sends him packing to escape Jordan's dissembling and New York's corruption. That longing for purity reveals itself as Platonic as he describes New York as the Dutch sailors must have seen it, which of course necessitates erasing the buildings, the people, and 300 years of history, a feat of ahistorical virtuosity that might even make Gatsby cringe but one that is certainly in keeping with the fairy tale's "spiritual perspective on the world," which "promulgate[s] a belief in things unseen [. . .]. Th[e] depiction of magic suggests the fairy tale's criticism of the materialism and neglect of spiritual values in contemporary society" (Jones 13).⁹ Nick is a strong believer in "things unseen." Driving to Myrtle and Tom's hideaway, he describes Fifth Avenue as "so warm and soft, almost pastoral, on the summer Sunday afternoon that I wouldn't

⁹According to Lüthi, the "sublimation of all material things [. . .] is one of the basic characteristics of fairy-tale style [. . .]. The ease and calm assurance with which it stylizes, sublimates, and abstracts makes it the quintessence of the poetic process, and art in the twentieth century has again been receptive to it" (146).

have been surprised to see a great flock of white sheep turn the corner" (32). His pastoral longing suits him to the fairy tale form, which, Brian Attebery contends, "seems most compatible with a certain bent [. . .] that rejects the modern world for the small, quiet, green one that the peasants knew," a green world like ours, only "fresher, grander, more alive," which results in "a sense of longing [. . .], a nostalgia for the never-was" (6, 12). In place of never-never land is a wasteland, a perversion of an agrarian world, signified through the ironic use of such words as "valley," "farm," "wheat," "hills," and "gardens," that sensitizes the reader to the absence of a pastoral paradise:

This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens, where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of grey cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-grey men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud which screens their obscure operations from your sight. (27)

Nick's squalid description of the Valley resembles the plains from which Dorothy escapes in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. "[T]he grey land" chokes out "spasms of bleak dust" (27). Like Uncle Henry and Aunt Em, George Wilson is spectral—"blonde, spiritless [. . .] [and] anemic," and covered in a "white ashen dust" (29, 30). It is no coincidence that George is a mechanic, a robot working in a factory of machines. His reliance on Tom's car to take him and Myrtle west is ironic. Not requiring the vehicle as a mode of transportation but as a commodity, George inadvertently implies that the machine's promise of mobility—both westward and upward—is illusory. Indeed, twenty-five years after Dorothy's first visit to Oz, the yellow brick that paved the way to the Wizard no longer leads to the Emerald City, or anywhere for that matter, in Fitzgerald's novel:

I followed [Tom] over a low white-washed railroad fence and we walked back a hundred yards along the road under Doctor Eckleburg's persistent

stare. The only building in sight was *a small block of yellow brick* sitting on the edge of the waste land, a sort of compact Main Street ministering to it and contiguous to absolutely nothing. One of the three shops it contained was for rent and another was an all-night restaurant approached by a trail of ashes; the third was a garage—Repairs. GEORGE B. WILSON. Cars Bought and Sold—and I followed Tom inside. (28-29; italics mine)

The road has stopped abruptly and been transformed into a strip mall, its promise of mobility sadly mocked by the “trail of ashes.”

Machines in *The Great Gatsby*, especially the green light at the end of the Buchanans’s dock, harbor talismanic qualities, and Nick, like Gatsby, is clearly infatuated with them. Nick’s longing for an old world of virgin land is tempered by an irresistible attraction to the new one of trains, hydroplanes, and automobiles, a tension demonstrated in *St. Nicholas* magazine. Fred Erisman notes that the magazine offers “the old, old lessons”—“duty, industry, thrift, and self-reliance” as well as “optimism, courage, [and] fortitude”; the magazine also stresses the importance of technological competence necessary to prosper in an urban, mechanized world, however (“Utopia” 66).¹⁰ Nevertheless, the society illustrated in *St. Nicholas*’s stories—one in which “man and machine live in harmony, [. . .] in which the comforts of the industrial era are complemented by the ideas of an earlier America” (Erisman, “Utopia” 72)¹¹—is subverted in *The Great Gatsby*, a novel in which humans and gadgets, especially automobiles and guns, prove a dangerous combination. Counteracting the litany of contrivances that inaugurates the third chapter, including two motor boats, a Rolls Royce, a station wagon, the railroad, and a miraculous gadget “which could extract the juice of two hundred oranges in half an hour” (43-44), are the

¹⁰Attebery notes that technology usurps the function of magic in American fairy tales by the twentieth-century (27).

¹¹These stories, Erisman asserts, glorify man’s ability to mold nature to his will through technology (“Utopia” 67).

novel's numerous references to car accidents and bad driving. Indeed, even the seemingly innocuous orange squeezer that requires that "a little button [be] pressed two hundred times by a butler's thumb" (44) represents the invention of a new mode of human subjugation.

Ironically, the most imposing machine in the novel is human. Tom, a "straw haired man of thirty" whose "body [is] capable of enormous leverage" (11), is routinely described as moving people, especially Nick, from place to place: "[He] compelled me from the room as though he were moving a checker to another square" (16); "Picking up Wilson like a doll Tom carried him into the office, set him down in a chair and came back" (148).¹² But Tom is not the only human machine in the novel. Gatsby's servants "toil [. . .] with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden shears" (43), and Gatsby himself, whose first degradation is the "incarnation" that ensures that "his mind would never romp again like the mind of God" (117), is ultimately "related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away" (6). The novel's metamorphosis of humans into machines provides a bleak inversion of Baum's animation of inanimate objects.

And Nick, the reader must assume, is one of those machines, for in his description the human cargo on the trains he so admires is enervated and degraded: "[T]he electric trains, men carrying, were plunging home through the rain" (101). The "constant flicker of men and women and machines" on Manhattan thoroughfares mesmerizes Nick and conflates the living and the dead. *The Great Gatsby's* hopelessness about the harmonious relationship between the pastoral and the technological is most profoundly illustrated in Nick, who never establishes that his own existence has rendered "the fresh green breast of the new world" obsolete. The trains of his fondest Midwestern memories have

¹²There are several other descriptions of Tom as a mechanical force on pages 12 and 28.

destroyed it, and his family's hardware business has made that destruction possible: "That's my middle-west—not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns but the thrilling, returning trains of my youth and the street lamps and sleigh bells, in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow" (184). The train tickets of Nick's youthful travels perversely share the color of the lost city of Oz itself, as does the upholstery of Gatsby's car, the novel's quintessential symbol of technology, and the machine that in effect kills both Myrtle and Gatsby, the two lower-class seekers of fortune and fame. Those green symbols, along with the green light at the end of the Buchanans's dock, are merely smaller and later versions of the Emerald City—full of promise and meaning but ultimately deceptive.

ADVERTISING AS THE AMERICAN FAIRY TALE

The green spectacles worn in the Emerald City are echoed throughout Fitzgerald's novel in the references to distorted vision and blindness caused by inebriation, stealth, or smoke. Moreover, the screen that obfuscates truth in Oz is echoed in *The Great Gatsby* as sight in the Valley of Ashes is dim because "ash-grey men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud which screens their obscure operations from your sight" (27). The most salient reference to vision in the novel is in the form of a billboard advertising the defunct practice of an optician. Described as "blue and gigantic," the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg "look out of no face but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a nonexistent nose" (27). Despite having been "dimmed a little by many paintless days under the sun and rain" (28), the eyes seem to pass judgment on the residents of the Valley of Ashes, or so thinks George Wilson, who views the billboard as God. The yellow spectacles and dimmed eyes contribute to the sense of blindness and deception in Fitzgerald's novel and connect the text to the green glasses of the Emerald City. Certainly, the advertisement bears a

resemblance to the Wizard in Baum's story—who hides behind a screen and projects images while claiming that he is mighty and terrible. Indeed, the image that Dorothy sees is very like the billboard: "In the center of the chair was an enormous Head, without body to support it or any arms or legs whatever. There was no hair upon this head, but it had eyes and nose and mouth, and was bigger than the head of the biggest giant" (187). The omnipotence of the presumed Wizard, whose ability to send Dorothy back to Kansas is taken for granted by Ozites, is apparently matched by his omniscience. After Dorothy explains her desire to return to Kansas, "[t]he eyes winked three times, and then they turned up to the ceiling and down to the floor and rolled around so queerly that they seemed to see every part of the room" (188), not unlike George Wilson's "God [who] sees everything" (167). In response to Dorothy's question about his location, he says "I am everywhere [. . .] but to the eyes of common mortals I am invisible" (258), making the connection between the Wizard and God nearly as clearly and ironically as the suggestion of the billboard optician's divinity in *The Great Gatsby*. Dennis Duffy argues that the Wizard, in representing self-actualization and self-creation, bears a strong connection to Jay Gatsby. But the Wizard represents something other than God, something antecedent to the protagonist's re-creation: he is marketing itself. Motivated by personal gain—the possible elimination of the Wicked Witch of the West—the Wizard agrees to meet Dorothy and her friends and inadvertently renders the non-human characters some benefits (though as I will explain shortly those benefits are more symbolic than material and therefore cost the Wizard nothing). Knowing full well that he cannot give Dorothy and her friends their hearts' desires, the Wizard nevertheless strikes a bargain with them. In his conversation with Dorothy, he says,

You have no right to expect me to send you back to Kansas unless you do something for me in return. In this country everyone must pay for everything he gets. If you wish me to use my magic power to send you home again you

must do something for me first. Help me and I will help you [. . .]. [U]ntil the Wicked Witch dies you will not see your Uncle and Aunt again. (188-189)

His *quid pro quo* approach suggests that he is not the “very good man” that he asserts himself to be after being discovered. He is, instead, an excellent manipulator who relies on Dorothy’s American acceptance of the exchange of goods or services as the only reasonable economy. Ironically, when the screen tips over, revealing “a little, old man, with a bald head and a wrinkled face, who seemed to be as much surprised as they were” (259),¹³ the characters do not exit the Emerald City in despair. Instead, as Stuart Culver notes, they accept the Wizard’s legerdemain and pay the extraordinary price that he demands—their silence about his secret. Rather than being a disappointment, his humanity—and therefore his deception—is a boon. The characters enjoy viewing the mechanism by which they were fooled, just as we enjoy the advertising that is designed to sell us products we do not need. As the nexus of capitalism, merchandising, religion, and fairy tales, the Wizard illustrates that merchandising is the new fairy tale for a nation that worships money. The conjunction of divinity and advertising suggested in 1900 is established by 1925: George Wilson sees God in the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg because advertising is omnipresent and omnipotent.

The Wizard is the consummate ad-man who manages to perpetrate a long-running con. Even after admitting that he has deluded the residents of Oz into accepting his omnipotence, he allows the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Lion to believe that operations he performs on them are more than symbolic. After giving the Scarecrow a lecture on why he does not need brains because “[e]xperience is the only thing that brings knowledge” and protesting that he is “not much of a magician” (270), the Wizard proceeds to stuff his head with “a measure of bran, [. .

¹³Leach notes that the Wizard is the center of the book and powerful in a capitalist sense (*Land of Desire* 254).

.] and a great many pins and needles” (278). The Tin Man is surgically implanted with a “pretty heart [. . .] of silk and stuffed with sawdust” (280), and the Lion swallows a liquid that Hearn identifies as alcohol. His work completed, the wizard “smiled to think of his success in giving the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman and the Lion exactly what they thought they wanted. ‘How can I help being a humbug,’ he said, ‘when all these people make me do things that everybody knows can’t be done?’” (283). The Scarecrow, the Woodman, and the Lion accept symbols for the virtues they desire, virtues, moreover, that each already has in abundance. These characters’ inability to perceive their intelligence, compassion, and courage in the absence of outward signs is an indication of the rising significance of representations.

Baum’s career as an actor, playwright, salesman, window dresser, and fantasist coupled with his work in photography and film demonstrate his commitment to illusion. Before Disney imagined his theme parks, Baum tried to sell his idea for an amusement park in Los Angeles, which would be based on the land of Oz. (Coincidentally, his Hollywood Boulevard home was called Ozcot.) Indeed, Baum was convinced that America was founded on illusion: “Barnum was right when he declared the American people like to be deceived [. . .]. The merchants are less to blame than their customers, for the cry is not so much for genuine worth as for something pretty and attractive at low cost,” a sentiment that recalls the Wizard’s lament that he is forced into fraud by an unreasonable constituency (qtd. in Leach, “Clown” 16). Near the end of his editorship of *The Show Window*, the journal of the National Association of Window Dressers, Baum produced a manual entitled *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows*, in which he advocates the use of live models. The fact that *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows* was published in the same year as *The Wizard of Oz* suggests that advertising was on Baum’s mind during the composition of his most famous fairy tale. But that is not the only coincidence of publication dates that connects his advertising treatises with

his fairy tales. In 1897, the year he founded *The Show Window*, Baum also produced his first published works, including *Mother Goose in Prose*. Indeed, the term “Emerald City” occurred to him while he was writing an article for *The Show Window*.¹⁴ As Leach notes, “[b]y the late 1890s, Baum’s mind was literally saturated in the dream-production and fantasy of a new cultural experience” (“Clown” 24).

Recently, several critics have argued that *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is less a utopian depiction of American individualism, ingenuity, loyalty and perseverance¹⁵ or a populist allegory¹⁶ than a celebration of “the turn-of-the-century emergence of ‘the culture of consumption,’” to use Richard Flynn’s phrase (122). Culver contends that the tale is a narrative of desire describing the Emerald City as a place in which unnecessary commodities are acquired just because of their appearance, a site where “consumption is the preferred mode of participation” (106). Leach has argued that

¹⁴In “The Clown of Syracuse,” Leach notes a strong connection between Baum’s non-fiction and his fiction (24-26).

¹⁵In one of the earliest critical essays on *The Wonderful World of Oz*, “An Appreciation,” Russell Nye described the Emerald City as utopic, a conclusion with which Joel Chaston concurs (“Baum, Bakhtin, and Broadway: A Centennial Look at the Carnival of Oz.” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 25.1 [2001]: 128-149). In contrast, Helen Kim contends that the utopian and manipulative aspects of mass culture are the same: “in the same moment that Dorothy and her friends shatter the illusion of the Wizard’s power, they also transform his lies to truths” because their desires are eventually satisfied” (229).

¹⁶Many critics have viewed the tale and later the film as an allegory of American politics, following the example of Henry Littlefield’s “The Wizard of Oz: Parable on Populism” (*American Quarterly* 16 [Spring 1964]: 47-68); Fred Erisman’s “L. Frank Baum and the Progressive Dilemma” (*American Quarterly* 20.3 [Autumn 1968]: 616-23), John G. Geer and Thomas R. Rochon’s “William Jennings Bryan on the Yellow Brick Road” (*Journal of American Culture* 16.4 [1993]: 59-63), and Francis MacDonnell’s “‘The Emerald City was the New Deal’: E. Y. Harburg and *The Wonderful World of Oz*” (*Journal of American Culture* 13.4 [1990]: 71-75). Generally, these essays consider the fairy tale a sympathetic portrayal of agrarianism.

[*The Wizard of Oz*] helped make people feel at home in America's new industrial economy, and it helped them appreciate and enjoy, without guilt, the new consumer abundance and way of living produced by that economy [. . .]. The book both reflected and helped create a new cultural consciousness—a new way of seeing and being in harmony with the new industrial order. (2)

“Being in harmony with the new industrial order” apparently coincided with increased purchasing, and Baum argued for the effectiveness of show windows to arouse in passers-by “cupidity and longing to possess the goods” (qtd. in Leach, “Clown” 22).

Zipes, on the other hand, has argued in several essays that Oz represents a socialist utopia: “Oz is the utopia that exposes the myth of America as land of the free and brave as a lie” (*Fairy Tale as Myth* 128). While many critics read the Emerald City as illustrative of Oz, Zipes argues that “Oz is *not* controlled by the Wizard [. . .], an *American* con man [who] has colonized the city, duped its gentle and naive inhabitants and introduced American standards based on salesmanship and deception that ultimately will not work in the land of Oz as a whole” (*When Dreams Came True* 174). The pastoral dimensions of his argument become clear in his assertion that in Baum's *The Emerald City of Oz* (1910) Kansas is a “place of exploitation, where Uncle Henry and Aunt Em are at the mercy of bankers” (179). The city—in both Baum's fairy tale and Fitzgerald's novel—must be made to bear the burden of America's failure, but in both cases the distinction between the city and the country is fraudulent. While the Emerald City—a world where everything is beautiful, every dress fits, every desire is said to be fulfillable—is purportedly the utopic vision of America, it reflects the actual nation—the land in which everything is subject to trade. Culver notes that Baum's book, unlike the film, does not “distinguish the space of fantasy from that of the real but leaves the two worlds standing side by side” (99). Dorothy does not wake up to realize that Oz was merely a dream world populated by family, friends, and acquaintances. That lack of a distinction suggests that Oz

functions in much the same way that Disneyland does in Jean Baudrillard's analysis of America:

Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the "real" country [. . .]. [It] is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. It is no longer a question of false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle. (12-13)

The America of *The Great Gatsby* shimmers and glistens in the way the Emerald City does, illustrating that we have created a land of commercials and advertisements, a land in which the image has replaced the subject.¹⁷

According to Roland Marchand, "the illustrations in American advertising portrayed the ideals and aspirations of the system more accurately than its reality. They dramatized the American dream" (Marchand xviii). In Wright Morris's *The Huge Season*, a novel which thematizes its indebtedness to *The Great Gatsby*, a character notes that "all the raw material [. . .] that was needed to write the great American novel" could be found in the Sears, Roebuck catalogue (210), which, fittingly, was also known as "America's Dream Book" (Ewen 144), a cognomen affirming that advertising is the new American fairy tale.¹⁸ Fittingly, the very elements that Leach identifies as central to the rise of a new American culture—color, glass, and light—are pervasive

¹⁷As Flynn notes, the loss of the real is also manifested in the production and serialization of the Oz books, even after Baum's death. But the utter loss of the original work occurs with the 1939 film, which becomes, according to Carol Billman, "the authoritative work to which all other tellings of the story, even the original one, must answer" (92).

¹⁸For Leach, nineteenth-century America's leading merchant, John Wanamaker, wrote advertising editorials that "show [. . .] the imprint of fairy tales" (*Land of Desire* 210). Further connection between merchandising and fairy tales appears in the playlets produced by department stores during the holiday season, among the most popular of which was a playlet based on Baum's *Oz* tales (330).

in *The Great Gatsby*.¹⁹ For Gatsby, the signs of the good life are awash in color: the green light at the end of the Buchanan's dock, his yellow Rolls Royce, "bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length with triumphant hatboxes and supper-boxes and tool-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of windshields that mirrored a dozen suns" (68), and, of course, Daisy herself, whose name conjures the color of the car and whose "low, thrilling" voice is finally described as "full of money [. . .] the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it" (127).

Baum's characters' search for a brain, a heart, and some guts is paralleled by Gatsby's quest for the holy grail of the American dream, and he is no less credulous of valueless expressions of worth than they are. When Gatsby's affair with Daisy begins, the green light loses its appeal, causing Nick to note that Gatsby's "count of enchanted objects had diminished by one" (98). The implication is that the symbol is more important than its real counterpart, the signifier more esteemed than the signified. Daisy is merely a symbol of wealth, status, and the good life, but there are less lofty examples of the effacement of reality by its image in the novel. While standing in his late son's mansion, Gatsby's father looks at a photograph as proof of his son's success: "it was a photograph of the house, cracked in corners and dirty with many hands. He pointed out every detail to me eagerly. 'Look there!' and then sought admiration from my eyes. He had shown it so often that I think it was more real to him now than the house itself" (180).

That Fitzgerald would be sensitive to the omnipresence and impact of images comes as no surprise considering that he spent the spring of 1920 at the advertising firm of Bannion, Collier; three years later, the marketing impulse still coursing through his veins, he suggested, in an essay entitled "How I Would Sell My Book," filling a store window with copies of his latest book

¹⁹Leach notes that the first edition of *The Wonderful World of Oz* was the most colorful children's book of its time (*Land of Desire* 249).

and placing “a man with large spectacles sitting in the midst of them, frantically engrossed in the perusal of a copy” (qtd. in Douglas 67). Fitzgerald’s marketing strategy is eerily reminiscent of Baum’s concept of living mannequins, and, as it turns out, Fitzgerald’s following book would be *The Great Gatsby*, a novel which for Fitzgerald was about “‘the loss of those illusions that give such color to the world that you don’t care whether things are true or false so long as they partake of the magical glory’” (qtd. in Chambers 99). “Absolution,” the story Fitzgerald wrote as a preface to *The Great Gatsby*, explores illusion as the desire “to make things finer [. . . , to brighten] up the dinginess [. . .] by saying a thing radiant and proud” (150) and begins in true fairy tale fashion with the words “There was once.” Rudolph, a boy who, like Gatsby, chooses to believe he is not his parents’ son, meets his imaginative match in Father Schwartz, a priest who extols the virtues of illusion as he describes amusement parks:

It’s a thing like a fair, only much more glittering. Go to one at night and stand a little way off from it in a dark place—under dark trees [. . .]. It will all just hang out there in the night like a colored balloon—like a big yellow lantern on a pole [. . .]. But don’t get up close [. . .] because if you do, you’ll only feel the heat and the sweat and the life. (150)

The danger of illusion for Fitzgerald, unlike Baum, is its exposure. Inevitably, we get too close and see the machinery—the screen that hides the Wizard’s powerlessness, the confessional booth that conceals the priest’s flawed humanity. A doll-house embodies the machinery of illusion in “Outside the Cabinet-Maker’s,” a story published three years after *The Great Gatsby* and one alluding to Baum’s *Oz* books. While his wife places an order for a doll-house at a cabinet-maker’s, a father entertains his daughter with a fairy tale about a beautiful princess who is held captive by an ogre. The story describes the father’s creation of a fantasy world as an expression of his love for his daughter, but he is also grappling with his own inability to appreciate his construction: “The man was old enough to know that he would look back to that time—the tranquil street and the pleasant

weather and the mystery playing before the child's eyes, mystery which he had created, but whose luster and texture he could never see or touch any more himself" (243). Heightening the father's sense of loss is the ensuing competition that occurs in the construction of the magic world. The daughter triumphs by eliminating everyone in the royal family except the Princess, who will reign as Queen. Losing the imaginative battle to his daughter, the father consoles himself with his accumulation of material wealth. Money is a recurring motif as the parents negotiate the price of the doll-house, which, like the fairy tale that the father manufactures, clearly represents the illusions whose seams will become apparent to the daughter in time.

The loss of illusion thematized in "Absolution" and "Outside the Cabinet-Maker's" finds its most pointed expression in "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," in which John Unger discovers that Percy Washington's grandfather came from Virginia and headed West with his slaves once it became apparent that the South would lose the Civil War.²⁰ Allowing his slaves to believe that emancipation never took place, he proceeds to amass a fortune. A story about American expansion, slavery, and imperialism, it insists that our vision of America is an imaginative reconstruction, a point the author makes through the fairy tale mode. For Fitzgerald, the fairy tale is a blistering commentary on the quintessential American fantasy because the story that we tell our children—that industry is the key to fame and fortune—has been replaced by the realization that "[t]he rich get richer, and the poor get—children," as a popular song from the twenties affirms (qtd. in *Gatsby* 101).

By 1925, the very language of the fairy tale is no longer translatable; all that remains is "an illusive rhythm, a fragment

²⁰For Lawrence Buell, this story is thematically connected to *The Great Gatsby* in its attention to both time and money ("The Significance of Fantasy in Fitzgerald's Short Fiction," *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald: New Approaches in Criticism*. Ed. Jackson R. Bryer. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1982. 23-38). Duffy provides an extended analysis of this story in his essay.

of lost words [. . . from] a long time ago" (118) whose meaning is swallowed by "the babbled slander of [Gatsby's] garden" (142). The old terms of the fairy tale have been revised, and *The Great Gatsby* is the palimpsest through which remnants of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* can be traced. Fitzgerald almost seems to be baiting the reader to see the connections as he writes over Baum's tale. The Scarecrow and Tin Man of Baum's tale are reduced to "a box full of straw and [. . .] a tin of large hard dog biscuits" for Myrtle's recently purchased pet (33). In their youth, Jordan and Daisy don "small tight hats of metallic cloth" (127), echoing the golden cap whose three wishes eventually transport Dorothy and her friends to Glinda, and the silver slippers which carry Dorothy home find their counterpart in the novel as well: "All night the saxophones wailed the hopeless comment of the 'Beale Street Blues' while a hundred pairs of golden and silver slippers shuffled the shining dust" (158). But Daisy is no Dorothy. Notwithstanding her description as "the golden girl in the white palace" (127), she is as indicative of the failure of the American fairy tale as is the previous tenant of Gatsby's mansion, a man who attempted to recreate a feudal manor by paying his neighbors to thatch their roofs.

The would-be feudalists' sense that the past offers truth and fulfillment is shared by Fitzgerald and his narrator. Upon being asked for directions in his new West Egg residence, Nick feels the authority of an explorer: "And as I walked on I was lonely no longer. I was a guide, a pathfinder, an original settler. He had casually conferred on me the freedom of the neighborhood" (8). But if freedom and comfort are the consequences of blazing the trail, then Nick is neither free nor comfortable because he has come too late, as his final words in the novel suggest. Fitzgerald, too, is confronted by the overwhelming feeling that he has missed an opportunity in American history: "I look at [America]—and think it is the most beautiful history in the world [. . .]. It is the history of all aspiration—not just the American dream but the

human dream and if I came at the end of it that too is a place in the line of pioneers” (qtd. in Turnbull 307).

In light of the suggestion that the quest for an authentic American self is an inherently nostalgic enterprise, Fitzgerald’s use of Baum’s turn-of-the-century fairy tale is deeply ironic because the longing for the past is itself the problem and, more pointedly, because the earlier text is not innocent. The groundwork for the failure of Gatsby’s vision is being laid in Baum’s Emerald City—in its citizens’ willing exchange of truth for the good life. But even Nick, who repeatedly observes that the manifestations of Gatsby’s dream are inadequate, does not realize that the failure of the symbols merely reflects the failure of the American fairy tale itself. Nor he does recognize that Gatsby’s dream is neither “incorruptible” nor original: both the narrator and his subject have been sold a bill of goods through advertising. The novel, then, is simultaneously an indictment of the new American culture of materialism and an advertisement for it—a celebration of “the colossal vitality of [. . .] illusion” (101). Nick apparently does not connect the vitality of illusion that he so admires in Gatsby with its other, more cynical, aspect and is shocked to learn that “one man could [. . .] play with the faith of fifty million people” by fixing the World Series (78). 1919, then, is not only the year of Baum’s death; it is also the year of an illusion so grand it deceived an entire nation. The burning question of 1919 is not, as the *New York Times* editorial implies, “What happens to fairy tales when we cease to believe in them?” but “What happens to America when we cease to believe in it?”—a question whose answer is found in the revision of the Emerald City as the Valley of Ashes.

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